We are dark. Americans are bright. You crave mobility. The car. You move from city to city so as not to grow stale. You don't stay too long in a place. A person who lives too long in the same house is suspect. It's someone who is held back. Friction keeps a stone polished. Mobility. You are alert. You get in and out of cars limberly. That is your grace. Our grace is weighty. Not yours. You worship the long leg and loose hip joint. How else to jump in and out of cars. You dress light. You travel light. You are light on your feet. You are light hearted and a light heart is a pump that brings you to motion. You aim to alight, throw the load overboard. Alight the flight. You are responsible. That is not a burden. You are responsible to things that move forward. You are responsible to the young. Not so much to the old. The old do not move forward. You will find a way for the old to move forward, have them join in your thrust. Solving a problem is not a burden to you. A problem solved is a lifting of a burden. Egyptians lifted heavy stones to build monuments. You lift them to get rid of heavy stones. Get rid of them! Obstacles! You are efficient. You simplify life. Paper work. Your forms are shorter, so is your period of obligation. Work. Your hours are shorter and you have more time to sit on the lawn in your cotton trousers.

Every Seventeen Minutes the Crowd Goes Crazy!

by Paul Zindel

The Play: The lives of the children in a large family turn complex when the parents abandon them in favor of traveling the country to the trotting races and Native-American casinos. The absent parents (gone now for two months) have left no provisions and show no signs of returning, communicating only by fax machine. As the children are divided about the pluses and minuses of being parentless, the tensions mount.

Time and Place: The present. Staten Island.

The Scene: *Dan (teen), one of the older brothers in the family, faces the audience and recalls a time he observed his mother (a psychotherapist) acting overly neurotic, obsessed with a current patient she was seeing.*

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DAN: The only thing I noticed different about my mother was the way she would sit around the house crying a lot—which, I suppose, is unusual for a psychotherapist. She seemed obsessed with the case history of this one child patient she had. She kept printing out copies of it and leaving it around our breakfast table and at the neighborhood ashrams and supermarkets. It was something horrible that had happened to a ten-year-old boy at Christmas. His parents were loaded. Filthy rich. The father was a Hollywood producer. His mother was a Mutual Funds feminist. And they wanted to surprise their son with the greatest Christmas ever—so they bought him wonderful things: a Schwinn ten-speed; rollerblades; a Lionel electric train set, skis, a sled, a tennis racket, a dog, candy, a BB pistol, a Swiss army knife—a Christmas tree flooded with gift-wrapped boxes and bows and tinsel everywhere. A huge living room crammed with presents and candy

canes. They had created this dream for their son, and on Christmas morning, their son came down the stairs into the living room—this ten-year-old boy saw this fantasy they bought him—and he burst into tears! "What's the matter, son?" his father cried out, rushing to him, holding him, hugging him—"Is there something you had your heart set on that you don't see? Is there something we forgot?" And the kid, wailing through his tears said, "I don't know, but there *could* be. There *could* be!" And that was when his father took back his hand and slapped his son with all his might. He slapped him and slapped him and slapped him!

The Scene: *Dave (late teens), Dan's older brother, has returned home to see his family. Here he tells Dan about the family he has been staying with.*

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DAVE: The house where I'm staying... It's this woman's—this family's. They've got a dog—a Springer spaniel. Her name's Mrs. Cavucci, that's the family's name... They include me in on things. Like everybody wakes up, we eat breakfast together—then someone says "Hey, let's go on a picnic"—and they grab their stuff and drive to a park. Play ball, sit on blankets, read books... They're vegetarians—Mrs. Cavucci makes cauliflower cheese pie, and this other thing we call cheese flops. Cheese flops sucks...They're liberal, the parents—but they put the kids first, they're holding double jobs to put them through college. The father pays the car insurance for his son, an old VW bug—it goes *Vroom Vroom*... At dinner they do this lame thing, we sit around the table and everyone tells one good thing that happened to them that day, and one rotten thing—and when you tell the bad thing, somebody says, "Hey, maybe I can help fix that." I don't mind hanging out

there. It's sixty dollars a week. The room sucks. They've got photos all over the place. If one of the kids writes a poem, *Bam,* it gets glued up. And Mrs. Cavucci has this man sitting on the fireplace mantle, it's really freaky, this foot tall carved man that's holding a real inch size bible—they're not religious but they do Christmas and Hanukkah—they're like really crazy liberals. Stupid momentos all over the place... A really dumb Model T Ford sculpture that's mounted on a teaspoon, I mean a lot of crap. Mexican paintings. A candle snuffer. They've got junk we've never even thought of—but sometimes they all go out and I go upstairs—this white rug goes upstairs where their bedrooms are—quilts and worn Indian rugs all over the place, and writing desks and books... And I get dizzy. Sometimes I have to hold onto the railing, because it seems the whole house is flying through space—like it's some kind of big time capsule—a whole house hurtling through the universe on a journey—and it makes me feel I want to go with it.